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The Parts of Speech

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THE PARTS OF SPEECH

He imagined it in slow
motion reverse: words, hers,
he made travel back
from his extremities
into the slowly un-comprehending
brain that sorted them
back into grammar, lost them dipped
in pits of now ungathering feeling,
then exited them as sound
from the ears to air
that carried them between.
The sound-shocks receded
to disappear between her lips
and teeth, through the mouth
and down the throat to the voice box
(a present, someone joked,
you can open all your life),
to change finally to impulse
and pleasure/pain somewhere
in the deep cells of her brain
(in normal forward time
all this took only
a second or two: "I love you").
For now he and she live out
the poet's hopeful truth
that speech is the mean,
the whole and parts of it
standing against death's extreme
by which tongues are changed
to small rubbery tombstones
that mark every silence
but a hurt one.
May this image help them survive
speech's later betrayals.